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"THE WAY OF DISCIPLESHIP»

LESSON 4 : RENUNCIATION

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INTRODUCTION

In the previous lesson we talked about total separation as being one of the requirements to become and remain a disciple. In that lesson we looked at the disciple in his relationship with other men. Our main focus was on the human relationships involving the disciple. In this lesson, we shall see the disciple in his relationship with the things in the world. In other words, we shall state the attitude that the Lord has commanded the disciple to adopt with regards to riches and material possessions.

The Lord Jesus said, "So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33). The Lord did not say, "Whoever does not renounce some or part of his possessions." He talked of renouncing all, and he was serious about this matter. As we present this message, we do not want to compromise the word of God or to obscure it due to our own past failures. We impart it just as the Lord proclaimed it, and may God be true even though man be a liar.

1. THE LORD JESUS HAD RENOUNCED ALL THINGS

The Lord Jesus has commanded us to renounce all. He also set the example of renunciation. He did not command anything that is impossible to do. He did not set an example that his disciples would try to follow without success but satisfied that they were close to success. The Lord meant that he would surely have disciples and that each of them would renounce all his possessions. Whoever says this is impossible accuses God of asking for the impossible.

Before coming down to the earth, the Lord Jesus lived in all the luxury and all the glory of heaven. He lacked nothing. He was rich. But when he decided to become man and to come into our world, he forsook all his glory and power, his possessions and everything. He lived on earth in poverty. Talking about him the apostle said:

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9).

So when the Lord calls people to renounce their ail he is inviting them to walk the road that he himself has walked.

It is important to note that the Lord Jesus Christ, in order to be a model to his disciples, that can be followed, did not live on earth like God, or like the Son of God. He lived like an ordinary man. We know that he called himself and loved to be called. Everywhere in the Bible we see Him refer to Himself as the son of man, the son of man, the son

of man, the son of man, ... He had definitely renounced all the wealth he possessed as Son of God. It is for this reason that at no place in the bible do we see him perform a miracle for his personal food needs. He did so for others, but never for himself. He did it for the sake of others, never for his own sake. He had given up all his riches in order to use them to enrich others. When it came to his own needs, he entrusted himself to God. We see this clearly in Matthew 4:1-4, Matthew 21:18-19. The Bible says that God has made his Son heir of all things, and that through Jesus he created the world (cf Hebrews 1:1-4). Thus all things were created through Jesus Christ for Jesus Christ. But he did not live on earth like a king or like a well-to-do person. He lived in poverty for he had renounced all things. It is on the basis of his own example that he has called anyone who would follow him to renounce all that he has. He did not ask for something impossible to do, and this is the reason why the first disciples could follow him along the path of total renunciation.

2. THE FIRST DISCIPLES HAD FORSAKEN ALL

The Bible describes the call of the first four disciples in the following words, "And passing along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And immediately they left their nets and followed Him. And going on a little further, He saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and followed Him" (Mark 1:16-20).

To these professional fishermen whose lives were linked to the sea and who had worked out a lucrative fishing business, the Lord called and they responded immediately. They left everything and followed Him. They did not discuss and debate what would become of the business when they would have left it. They did not ask how their parents would be fed if the business collapsed. They did not think of their parents back home and wonder how they would feel if they did not go back to explain everything about their call to them. They did not ask for a guarantee that they would be fed and clothed. They did not ask for details about the nature of their future occupation. All they knew was that the Lord of all glory had invited them to follow Him and that such a privilege comes only to a few and they must not let it go. They knew what it was costing them and they preferred the loss with Him rather than all the world without Him.

What of Levi, the collector? The Bible says, "After this He went out and saw a tax collector, named Levi, sitting at the tax office; and He said to him, "Follow me" "And he left everything, and rose and followed him" (Luke 5:27-28). This experienced civil servant who had probably established a good record with the possibility of a good pension encountered the Lord Jesus and, at His invitation, he forsook career, comfort, security and all for the "uncertainties" of life with one who gave him no guarantee of a career, comfort and security; yet he felt compelled to follow Jesus at the cost of everything. What did his colleagues think of him? They possibly thought that he was mad but like Moses who, "considered abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he looked to the reward," (Hebrews 11:26) he went on with the Lord.

After Pentecost, the disciples renounced their material possessions, but did not renounce all of them. The early disciples did not only forsake all their possessions but they gave out all that they had for the common good of all the brethren. The Bible says, "Sow the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need. Thus Joseph who was surnamed by the apostles Barnabas (which means, son of encouragement) a Levite, a native of Cyprus sold a field which belonged to him, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet" (Acts 4:32-37).

3. THE CASE OF THE RICH

YOUNG RULER (MARK 10:17-31)

"And as He was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before Him, and asked Him, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' And Jesus said to him, 'why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your father and your mother' and he said to him, 'Teacher, all these I have observed from my youth.' And Jesus looking upon him loved him and said to him, 'You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure In heaven; and come, follow . 'At that saying his countenance fell, and he went

away sorrowful; for he had great possessions" (Mark 10:17-22).

This young man was exemplary in many areas of life:

1. He passed the test of urgency for he did not walk up to Jesus but ran to Him.
2. He passed the test of humility for he did not stand up and ask his questions but knelt before the Lord.
3. He passed the test of intelligence for he asked right questions to the right person.
4. He passed the test of discrimination for he did not ask a trivial question but came to the one important issue of his life and spoke out.
5. He passed the test of obedience to the legal demands of the law for he said to Jesus, "All these I have observed from my youth." Jesus who knew the hearts of all men did not contradict him. The Lord accepted the fact that he was morally perfect.
6. He won the love of the Lord. The Bible says, "And Jesus looking upon him loved him." The Lord loved every one but only a few people are mentioned in particular as having been loved by the Lord. This young man was in this privileged class. But,
7. He failed the test of forsaking all. His commitment to things was greater than his commitment to eternal life. His commitment to himself was far greater than his commitment to the Lord Jesus.

His failure to pass the test of forsaking all brought him utter spiritual ruin. He missed heaven completely. All the six tests that he passed became useless to Him. He scored the same mark with all those who passed no test at all.

The Lord invites all would-be disciples to forsake all. All who disobey Him miss out completely. There is no future for anyone who hopes to follow the Lord partially. The rich young ruler was told, "You lack one thing" (Mark 10-20). The Lord also says to you today, "You lack one thing." He did not allow the rich young ruler to begin to search out, analyze and try to find out what he lacked. He was told plainly. The Lord wants to talk to you plainly. He says, "You lack.." Do you understand? The Lord asked him to do something about it. You too, go and do something about it; if not, you will be disqualified.

4. THE CASE OF THE DISCIPLE TODAY

Having read the story of the rich young ruler, some people may say, "Luckily for me I do not have great possessions! "But we wish to reaffirm that the message of renunciation of all things is addressed to everybody, to whoever wants to follow Christ, and not merely to some people. Since it is a question of renouncing all, each person has at least clothing, a pair of shoes, a dress, etc. A person might have just one thing he possesses and make of this possession a god. At this point we will make a difference between renunciation and separation (in the physical sense). In reality, renouncing a possession does not necessarily mean throwing it away. One can throw away a possession without actually renouncing it just as one can renounce it without actually parting with it.

One can live in a house that does not belong to one. He is just a user of the house without being the owner. On the day the owner will ask him to quit, the user will not stop to argue because he knows the house is not his. When the disciple renounces a possession that is his, this possession changes hands. The Lord Jesus becomes the new lawful owner of it. The Lord may demand that the property be abandoned or offered freely to someone else. The Lord may also ask its former owner (the disciple) to keep it for Him. Whatever the case, the disciple who has truly renounced all he has will experience no resistance in his heart to obey because the matter had already been settled. So, renunciation takes place in the heart of man. As to the manner renunciation is demonstrated, this depends on each individual situation, especially on the Lord to whom the disciple has transferred the ownership of his property. So whether it is a dress, a pair of shoes, a bag, a radio, a house, land, a car, or other material possessions, it is of no importance; the disciple must renounce his all; this is what matters to the Lord.

Some people are bound by the things they do not possess. They are always dreaming that they have got this and that thing, that they have become as rich as other people, ... Renunciation does not only concern the things we already own, it also concerns the things we shall own. I remember a brother who, twenty months after knowing the Lord, was preparing for his final exams at the university. It was during this time that the brother went through a crisis of renunciation of all. About his exam, the Lord asked him, "What will you do if I don't grant you success?" This brother said to the Lord, "I would like to pass this exam, but if you hold a different opinion about my having this certificate, thy will be done, Lord."

After this transaction with God, this brother wrote the exam and passed with the first and the last honors of his university career. The certificate he obtained was useful to him later but he had renounced it as from the day he replied sincerely to God, "Thy will be done."

5. WHY MUST WE RENOUNCE OUR ALL?

5.1. The love of money is the root of all evils

When the Lord Jesus arrested Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, one career ended there and then, a new career was born into the heart of the former Pharisee. One ambition perished forthwith and another ambition, that of winning Christ became his one reason for living. Whatever he had acquired of earthly goods, he forsook completely and was later on to say, "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him" (Philippians 3:7-9).

This apostle wrote to a younger man of God saying, "There is great gain in godliness with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, but if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all evil; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs" (I Timothy 6:6-10).

However, this apostle did not fold his hands and do nothing because the love of money was the root of all evils. No! On the contrary he worked very hard with his hands, making money for his needs and for the needs of those who worked with him.

He was satisfied with or without money. He said, "Not that I complain of want; for I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want" (Philippians 4:11-12).

5.2. You shall have no other god before me

Some people who read the bible poorly say money is the root of all evil. The bible never said so; Paul, the apostle, never said so. Rather, he said the love of money is the root of all evil. We have earlier quoted this apostle who said that he worked with his hands in order to provide for his needs and the needs of his co-workers. The apostle rather warns us about the love of money for "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24).

Renouncing one's goods does not signify that the goods are useless. Rather, it means we do not depend on them but on God alone. The disciple of Jesus Christ must not have any god before the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. All on which man depends is another god. Anything that a child of God may depend on other than God himself, is another god before the only true

God. The believer who has renounced everything in his life except one thing is as much an idolater as those who bow down before statues or who pour oil or blood on stones and trees. Such a believer's case is more serious for his idolatry is enveloped in hypocrisy. Any time we wish, we could destroy a statue or cut down a tree or break a stone to pieces. But who can get to an idol which is hidden in the heart?

Renunciation of all things is simply a call to depend totally and exclusively on God. The heart of the disciple becomes so narrow that it has only room for God alone. Are you a disciple? Do you want to become one? You must renounce your all. If you depend on God and on something else, be they little or big, you are not a disciple; you are an idolater. If you want to become a disciple of Jesus Christ, you know what to do: renounce all, will you? Your all except nothing. Be courageous and may God bless you, my dear pilgrim.

6. THE DANGERS OF DISOBEDIENCE

Paul, the apostle wrote to Timothy:

"No soldier on service gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to satisfy the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules" (2 Timothy 2:4-5).

The truth is that acquiring worldly possessions is a source of worry and all kinds of anxiety. When these possessions are handed over to God, there will be no need to worry and to be anxious for God has the power to keep what is his. Those who are rich for themselves and not towards God cannot render him any service. They cannot carry out a spiritual ministry for all true service to God demands all the mind,

all the strength, and all the heart of the servant, and God only accepts service that comes from a pure (individual) heart. Those who live on riches that do not belong to God, worry about them, and are distracted in one way or another. They are worried about thieves, fire, accidents, economic crisis, the increase or the fall in prices, and so on. This is the lot of soldiers disqualified by the master, for they are unworthy of the kingdom of God.

We cited earlier the case of Barnabas (Acts 4:32-37) who had sold his field and got rid of the income from the sale. Later, we see him called upon to be an apostle and to go from place to place carrying out his apostolic ministry (Acts 9:13).

If he had not obeyed the Holy Spirit's command to sell his field at the right time and to invest the money in the Lord's work, this possession would have become a trap for him. He would have settled on his farm and continued to cultivate it although God has need of him elsewhere. Or he might have departed without cutting off his link to his property. While in Antioch, he would have continued to think about Cyprus, his home, because of the farm he had left behind, in other words, he would have been a total failure had he not got rid of his farm. By selling the farm, he cut off the material link with Cyprus and also transferred his heart out of this island.

Honey and the world's goods are useful; it is not forbidden to be rich as long as one is rich for God. Those who have renounced their all have entered into the rest of God. They do not bear on their hearts any burden other than the burden of Christian service.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

As we said earlier, it is not forbidden to be rich as long as we are rich for God. In reality those who are rich for God do not amass riches on earth; rather they transfer them to heaven. There is no place in heaven for lazy disciples. Those who have invested nothing in heaven will have no place there. No one will welcome them. This type of charity does not exist there. Each disciple should work hard and earn as much money as possible in order not to bring disgrace upon the name of the Lord. What must he do to get rid of the wealth he thus acquires? He should spend the strictest minimum of all that he earns on food, clothing and on other real necessities of life without resorting to indulgence of any kind.

All that is not used to meet these strict necessities of life must be used in the following way:

1. To supply the needs of the brethren. This means that no brother or sister must be allowed to continue in need while you have some money or property.
2. To supply the needs of the Gospel ministry - producing tracts and other teaching materials, evangelism, church planting, church building, etc as the Lord leads and providing for the needs of people involved in these ministries provided that the ministry satisfied the following conditions:
 - a- Is being carried out according to the will of God. Do not support anything that is carried out according to human traditions and not according to Christ and His Word (The Bible).

- b- Is being carried out for the sole glory of the Lord and His glory alone. Do not support anything which has as a goal the glorification of any individual, group of individuals, systems, philosophy, doctrine or denomination. If you support any such thing you will give account on judgment day.
 - c- Is being carried out by people who walk close to the Lord in purity. Do not support sin and pleasure-lovers to continue in their folly or else you will become a partaker their sin.
3. So money should be stored for the future. God's work must be carried out today. The many needs of the gospel enterprise today must be met. We do not know what the future holds. We must trust the Lord today for the needs of tomorrow and use all that we have to satisfy His needs today. We must believe Him to supply all our needs of tomorrow. If we cannot trust Him but want to have our confidence in a bank account or some property, we will soon find that we have lost out completely and that we are not His disciples.

Money used as shown in 1, 2, 3, above is money saved up in heaven. This is our real treasure that no one can take from us. The world is not a permanent home. It is a cursed system which is destined for destruction; it is for this reason that God encourages no one to invest in It. Rather, we are to store up riches in heaven. Those who are great in the world's eyes, because they have invested in the world will be absent in heaven, or rather, will be very small in heaven if at all they get there.

On the contrary, those who are small according to the world because they have willingly made themselves poor on earth in order to store up riches for themselves in heaven, will be great in the kingdom of heaven. Where is your treasure? is it here on earth or in heaven? You know where it is. In lesson 4, we shall examine the fourth condition for abiding as a disciple of Christ:

"Abiding in the word."

QUESTIONNAIRE

SECTION 1

1- In lesson two we saw the second condition for becoming and remaining a disciple: total separation. Say in one or two sentences what it is all about.

2- What is the difference between renunciation and separation?

3- Mention four things the Lord Jesus had renounced

a)

b)

c)

d)

4- Mention six disciples who had the experience of renunciation and what they renounced.

a)

b)

c)

d)

e)

f)

5- Can those who disobey the Lord's command to renounce all be saved all the same? Give reasons for your answer.

6- Say whether or not the experience of renunciation varies from one person to another and according to the amount of material possessions. Justify your answer.

7- Among your material possessions is there an item you have not renounced? If yes, which one?

8- Does the Holy Spirit witness to your heart that there is nothing you are clinging to?

9- Are you ready to make the following prayer? "Lord, visit all my material possessions and destroy or separate me from that

you do not want to see me possess." If yes, copy this prayer in the lines below and sign.

SECTION 2

10- Which commandment of God agrees with the principle of renouncing all?

11- Which of the Jewish tribes was not allowed to have any possessions on earth in the Old Testament?

12- How was the tribe to live?

13- What inheritance did God give this tribe?

14- How is this principle presented in the few Testament?

(Give bible reference)

15- What is the danger of loving money?

16- Is it forbidden therefore to look for money?

17- For what purpose ought one to look for money?

18- Whom will you advise not to look for money for God?

Why?

19- What did Barnabas give up?

20- What benefit was reaped as a result of this renunciation?

21- In what trap might he have fallen had he not obeyed the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to his heart?

22- Is the Holy Spirit pointing out something among your possessions or in your heart he wants you to renounce? What is it?

23- Will you obey? When and how?

24- What generally are the dangers of disobedience?

SECTION 4

25- Ought we to amass wealth?

26- Where and how should the disciple amass wealth?

27- Is it obligation to amass wealth? Why?

28- Have you already amassed wealth? Where?

29- What are your planning for the future?

30- Why is it difficult for a lazy person to be saved?

31- Give three criteria that should characterize a work worth being supported financially.

Have you got something else to say about this lesson?